

Research Article

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Idiomatic Expression in The American Sitcom Series *Fresh Off The Boat* Directed By Nahnatchka Khan

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Abstract

This research aims to classify the form and meaning of idiomatic expressions in the American Sitcom entitled *Fresh Off the Boat*. This research focuses on seasons 5 and 6 that were released on 2019 and 2020. The data of this research is in the form of utterances which contains idiomatic expressions uttered by three main characters, Eddie Huang, Louis Huang, and Jessica Huang. The researcher uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the research finding. From those series, there are 93 idiomatic expressions based on the theory proposed by Adam Makkai, they are 21 Phrasal Verb Idioms, 50 Tournure Idioms, 1 Irreversible Binomial Idiom, 18 Phrasal Compound Idioms, and 3 Incorporating Verb Idioms. From those data, the researcher compares the lexical and contextual meanings of idiomatic expressions in the utterances. Based on the research's finding, several idiomatic expressions have the same lexical and contextual meaning. However, the contextual meaning dominated the meaning of idiomatic expressions in this series because an idiomatic expression cannot be seen lexically or based on the dictionary meaning. It should be seen based on the context of the idiomatic expression is used because sometimes, it carried figurative meaning.

Keywords: idiom; form of idiomatic expressions; meaning of idiomatic expression.

1. Introduction

American English speakers attach idioms to basic conversation in daily life. Not only uses in conversation or spoken form but idiomatic expressions are also used in written form, either formal or informal situations [1]. Idioms are used by native speakers to make their speech lively and colorful. The use of Idiomatic expressions contributes significantly to the enrichment of the English language. Idioms convey distinct cultural and historical

information while also broadening people's comprehension and use of the English language.

An idiom is a word or phrase with a figurative meaning that differs from its literal meaning. It uses to enhance the speaker's or writer's message to gain the hearer's or reader's attention [2]. An idiom is a phrase that cannot break down by analyzing the meaning of the words that make up the phrase because the meaning is different from the single word that built it.

Idiomatic expressions can be found in the daily communication of native speakers. Besides, idiomatic expressions are also found in literary works such as novels, poetry, movie, and short story. For native speakers, it is easy to understand the meaning of idiomatic expressions, but for non-English speakers, it is a different thing. For example, the expression "Once in a blue moon", if this phrase divines from the literal meaning, it means that someone has to wait for something to happen when the blue moon shows up. Therefore, this expression is used to describe something that happens rarely.

An idiom is assumed as a figure of speech that negates the principle of a word's structure [3]. An idiom defines as a term or a group of words that the meaning cannot be deduced from its literal definition [4]. Either can be a phrase or sentence, an idiom which meaning is not clear through knowledge of individual words meaning that construct a phrase or sentence. Thus, it must be learned as a whole component. For non-English speakers, idiomatic expression is difficult to understand and sometimes leads to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Thus, it must be learned as a whole component. Therefore it is needed to understand the form of idiomatic expression. By knowing the form of idiomatic expressions, people can distinguish the existence of an idiom in a sentence or utterance. Another important thing is to know the context or situation occurred when the idiomatic expression is uttered to understand the meaning or message stated by the speaker or writer.

An idiomatic expression is not only used by American people, moreover non-native speakers such as immigrants can also use idiomatic expressions. It occurs because they lived and arose there. An immigrant who already stayed in America will assimilate to the culture, language, and behavior. Therefore, they can speak English very well and can use idiomatic expressions fluently as a native. Because of this, the researcher chose the American Sitcom series entitled *Fresh Off The Boat* as the object of this research. Besides the title of this series is grabbing attention, because the title *Fresh Off The Boat* belongs to an idiomatic expression that refers to a newly immigrated person, especially without having yet assimilated the host country's language, culture, or behavior [5].

Agree with the title, the series represents the life of a Taiwanese American family in the 1990s who migrated from Taiwan to Chinatown of Washington, DC and moved again to Orlando, Florida to open their own business which is a steakhouse to be an independent family out of their big Chinese family in Washington. Even though the background of the family is a Chinese family, they lived in America for around 20 years and arose their family there. Their children were born and growth in America. Therefore, they speak English fluently as well as they use English idiomatic expressions in a conversation.

In this research, the researcher analyzes idiomatic expressions found in television series because there are plenty of idiomatic expressions used by the series' characters in the conversation. Other than that, television series is a depiction of social life and it displays a visual illustration. Therefore, the audience can understand the context of the idiomatic expressions by paying attention to the situation.

The researcher uses an American situational comedy or sitcom television series created by Nahnatchka Khan entitled *Fresh Off The Boat* as the object of the research. This series was released on February 4, 2015 and finished on February 21, 2020. This series has six seasons and 116 episodes. In this research, the researcher only focused on seasons 5 and 6 because both seasons are the latest season of the series. Furthermore, the latest seasons showed language novelty instead of the previous seasons.

This American series is the first series featuring of Asian cast as the main character in 100 episodes. This series was also nominated for major awards, such as NAACP Image Award, Critics' Choice Television Award and some of the casts won the award. Besides, there are plenty of idiomatic expressions used in the utterance.

Based on the phenomena stated above and the popularity of the series, the researcher is interested to examine the idiomatic expressions uttered by the main character in the *Fresh Off The Boat* series, Eddie Huang, Louis Huang, and Jessica Huang state the main characters. These three main characters showed three different roles in the family and the language style that they used to communicate with each other.

2. Methods

This research uses descriptive qualitative method. This method deals with the aims of the study which is to identify the forms of idiomatic expression based on their structure. Other than that, it is used to analyze the lexical and contextual meaning of idiomatic expressions uttered by the three main characters in the *Fresh Off The Boat* series in seasons 5 and 6. Since the research data is from a series entitled *Fresh Off The Boat*, the researcher elaborated note-taking technique to obtain the data of idiomatic expressions used by the main characters.

3. Results

In this American Sitcom series, there are five forms of idiomatic expressions based on Makkai's theory. The researcher collected 93 data of idiomatic expressions in the series. The researcher examined the form of decoding idioms called lexemic idioms proposed by Adam Makkai as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Form of Idiomatic Expression in the *Fresh Off The Boat* series

No.	Form of Idiomatic Expression	Total
1.	Phrasal Verb	
	Verb + Adverb	18
	Verb + Preposition	3

	Total	21
2.	Tournure	
	Type 1	4
	Type 2	18
	Type 3	1
	Type 4	13
	Type 5	14
	Total	50
3.	Irreversible Binomial	1
4.	Phrasal Compound	
	Adjective + Noun	8
	Noun + Noun	6
	Verb + Noun	4
	Total	18
5.	Incorporating Verb	
	Adjective + Verb	2
	Noun + Verb	1
	Total	3

The table above shows five forms of idiomatic expressions based on Makkai's classifications in the series. Those are 21 Phrasal Verb Idioms, 50 Tournure Idioms, 1 Irreversible Binomial Idiom, 18 Phrasal Compound Idioms, and 3 Incorporating Verb Idioms

4. Discussion

The authors analyzed the causes of the absence of mother's love as well as the impact of the absence of love experienced by the main female character in Jacqueline Wilson's novel entitled *The Story of Tracy Beaker* based on the findings that are written in the results above.

4.1 Form of Idiomatic Expressions

From the table above, the forms of idiomatic expression are analysed below, which are presented in quotation as follows:

4.1.1 Phrasal Verb Idiom

Phrasal verbs are verbs that include two or three words. Based on Adam Makkai's theory of phrasal verb idiom, the researcher found two categories of the phrasal verbs used by the main characters in the Sitcom *Fresh Off The Boat* series. They are phrasal verbs

consisting of Verb + Adverb and Verb + Preposition. Those classifications of phrasal verb idiom are examined below:

a. Verb + Adverb

In the Sitcom *Fresh Off The Boat* series, the researcher found 18 forms of Phrasal Verb idiom in the form of Verb + Adverb, for example:

(1) Louis: 'I guess I can **squeeze you in.**'

(S05, E14, 00:05:50)

From the datum (1), this utterance contains an idiomatic expression **squeeze in**. From its language structure, the word **squeeze** is a verb, and the word **in** is an adverb. In this expression, the **squeeze** is a transitive phrasal verb because it is followed by an object **you**.

(3) Louis: 'Then we **buckle down.**'

(S06, E1, 00:11:26)

From the datum (3), this utterance contains an idiomatic expression **buckle down**. The word **buckle** is a verb from its language structure, and the word **down** is an adverb. In this expression, **buckle down** is an intransitive phrasal verb idiom because an object does not follow it.

b. Verb + Preposition

In addition to what has been mentioned in the explanation above, the structure of phrasal verb idiom can also be in the form of Verb + Preposition, for example:

(4) Jessica: 'My Christmas card **kick off** holiday season, and everyone expects perfection from me.'

(S06, 00:07:46)

From the datum (4), this utterance contains the idiomatic expression **kick-off**. The word **kick** is a verb from its language structure, and the word **off** in this sentence is a preposition. **Kick-off** is a transitive phrasal verb idiom in this expression because an object follows it.

4.1.2 Tournure Idiom

A tournure idiom is a verb phrase idiom which consists of at least three lexicons or words. In this research, the researcher found 49 tournure idioms. Those idioms are classified into five types of tournure idioms, which are discussed below.

a. Type 1: Require compulsory "it"

This form of tournure idiom requires the word "it" on the form. There are two types of it. The first is "it," which appears in the middle of a phrase, and the second is "it," which appears at the end, for example:

(6) Louis: 'But what if we **spice it up** this year?'

(S05, E14, 00:02:14)

From the datum (6), the idiomatic expression in this utterance is to **spice it up**. From its structure form, the phrase belongs to the tournure idiom. This form of tournure

idiom is categorised as type 1 because in the expression *spice it up, there* is the word *it* in the middle of the phrase.

b. Type 2: Require Definite and Indefinite Article

This form requires a definite and indefinite article in the expression. There are 18 idiomatic expressions of this form found in the series. Those forms are examined below:

(8) Louis: 'Just *around the corner*.'

(S06, E4, 00:16:23)

From the datum (8), the idiomatic expression in this utterance is *around the corner*. From its structure, it belongs to the tournure idiom. This form of tournure idiom is categorized as type 2 because, in the expression *around the corner*, there is a definite article in the phrase.

(10) Jessica: 'You should *keep an eye*.'

(S06, E6, 00:11:15)

From the datum (10), this utterance contains idiomatic meanings. The idiomatic expression in this utterance is to *keep an eye*. From its structure from the phrase, it belongs to the tournure idiom. This form of tournure idiom is categorised as type 2 because in the expression *keep an eye; there* is an indefinite article *an* in the phrase.

c. Type 3: Contain Irreversible Binomial

This form of tournure idiom contains irreversible binomial. There is only one idiomatic expression of this form found in this Sitcom series, as shown below:

(11) Louis: 'You're stuck *between a rock and a hard face*.'

(S06, E11, 00:15:20)

From the datum (11), this utterance contains an idiomatic expression *between a rock and a hard face*. From its structure formed, the phrase belongs to the tournure idiom. This form of tournure idiom is categorised as type 3 because there is an irreversible binomial in the expression between a rock and a hard face. This kind of tournure idiom contains conjunction *and connects* two words.

d. Type 4 : The primary verb directly followed by an object

This form of tournure idiom can be indicated by the existence of an object and other potential modifiers which directly follow the primary verb. The researcher found 13 tournure idioms in this form, one of which is examined below:

(12) Jessica: 'I knew *to draw the line*.'

(S06, E2, 00:15:26)

From the datum (12), this utterance contains an idiomatic expression *to draw the line*. From the structure that formed the phrase, it belongs to the tournure idiom. This form of tournure idiom is categorized as type 4 because in the expression *to draw the line, there* is an object which is *the line* which directly follows the primary verb, *draw*.

e. Type 5 : Consist of Verb + Preposition + Noun

The form of this tournure idiom is the primary verb directly followed by preposition + noun or nothing. The researcher found 14 tournure idioms in this form, one of which is examined below:

(15) Jessica : 'It's a *waste of time*.'

(S06, E9, 00:13:14)

From the datum (15), the idiomatic expression in this utterance is a waste of time. This expression belongs to the tournure idiom and is categorized as type 5 because it consists of the word waste as a verb, and the word of as a preposition, followed by the word *time* as a noun.

4.1.3 Irreversible Binomial Idiom

Irreversible binomial idiom requires conjunction such as "and" and "or". In this Sitcom series only found one irreversible binomial expression as examined below:

(16) Louis: 'You earned this *fair and square*.'

(S05, E19, 00:04:55)

From the datum (16), this utterance contains idiomatic expression *fair and square*. *This expression belongs to the irreversible binomial idiom from the structure that formed the phrase* because the conjunction connects it. Moreover, from its language structure, this expression consists of two same levels of the part of speech which is an adjective. Those adjectives are *fair*, and the other one is *square*.

4.1.4 Phrasal Compound idiom

Phrasal compound idiom consists of some words which blend into one, although their parts do not determine their meaning. This category includes the main nominal with patterns such as adjective + noun, noun + noun, verb + noun, and noun + preposition. In this Sitcom series found 18 phrasal compound idioms, as in the following examples:

a. Adjective + Noun

This phrasal compound idiom consists of an adjective followed by a noun. In this Sitcom series, the researcher found eight phrasal compound idioms in this type, as in the following example:

(17) Jessica: '*Fat chance*.'

(S05, E14, 00:02:28)

From the datum (17), this utterance contains the idiomatic expression *fat chance*. From the structure that formed the phrase, in this expression, the word *fat* is an adjective, and the word *chance* is a noun.

b. Noun + Noun

This phrasal compound idiom consists of a noun followed by a noun. In this Sitcom series, the researcher found six phrasal compound idioms in this type, as in the following example:

(20) Jessica : 'Yes, Evan. See, this is why you are my *star child*.'

(S05, E10, 00:00:43)

From the datum (20), this utterance contains the idiomatic expression *star child*. Based on its structure, the word *star* is a noun, and the word *child* is a noun.

c. Verb + Noun

This phrasal compound idiom consists of a verb followed by a noun. In this Sitcom series, the researcher found four phrasal compound idioms in this type, as in the following example:

(21) Eddie : 'We're literally *cutting corners*.'

(S06, E9, 00:11:32)

From the datum (21), this utterance contains an idiomatic expression of *cutting corners*. Based on its structure, the word *cutting* is a Verb, and the word *corners* is a Noun.

4.1.5 Incorporating Verb Idiom

Incorporating verb idiom can consist of Noun + Verb, Adjective + Verb, or Noun + Adjective. In this Sitcom series, found idioms, as in the following examples:

a. Adjective + Verb

This type of incorporating verb idiom consists of an adjective followed by a verb. In this Sitcom series, the researcher found 2 containing verb idioms in this type, as in the following example:

(23) Jessica: 'You always make me do the *dirty work*.'

(S05, E9, 00:14:49)

From the datum (23), this utterance contains the idiomatic expression *dirty work*. From the structure that formed the phrase, this expression consists of the word *dirty*, which is an Adjective and the word *work* which is a verb.

b. Noun + Verb

This type of incorporating verb idiom consists of a noun followed by a verb. In this Sitcom series, the researcher found 1 containing verb idiom in this type, as in the following example:

(24) Eddie: 'No, I mean, yes, that is also mind-blowing.'

(S06, E2, 00:17:08)

From the datum (24), the idiomatic expression in this utterance is mind-blowing. From the structure that formed the phrase, this expression consists of the word *mind*, a noun, and the word *blowing*, a Verb.

4.2 The Difference between Lexical and Contextual Meaning of Idiomatic Expressions.

In this subchapter, the researcher examines the meaning of Idiomatic Expressions based on the theory proposed by Lyons. Those meanings are lexical and contextual

meaning. The researcher presents the data in quotations of the idiomatic expressions followed by the importance analysis.

Datum 25

Eddie : ‘Okay, okay, okay. You win. I *sweet-talked* Harv, moved some shifts around, and bada bing, bada boom, I can help you out again. Let’s talk numbers. I’m sure you’ll find this more than fair.’

Eddie : ‘Oh, hmmm. So kind of you to offer, Eddie, but I already found a replacement.’

Trent : ‘Howdy-doo, Eddie. Table for one?’

(S05, E7, 00:07:07)

This utterance occurred when Eddie encountered his father, who owns Cattleman’s Ranch Steakhouse. He offered to return as an employee at his father’s restaurant. He said that he had already dealt with his colleague at the mattress store to change the work shift with him. Thus, he can work at his father’s restaurant.

Datum (25), uttered by Eddie, contains an idiomatic expression. The idiomatic expression is written in bold, which is *sweet-talked*. This expression belongs to incorporating verb idiom. Lexically, the meaning of *sweet* is being, causing, or characterizing by one of the five basic taste sensations. At the same time, the word *talked* means exchanging thoughts or negotiating with someone. The meaning of the idiomatic expression *sweet-talked* is to speak in a meant to impress or persuade someone. Thus, contextually the character Eddie convinced his co-worker named Harv subtly to switch shifts with him at work. Therefore, in this utterance, the meaning of idiomatic expressions sought to be seen contextually.

Datum 26

Jessica : ‘Well, we took a couple runs at my photo I.D., but we finally got there. The only problem is, my educational administration classes are so expensive, I could only afford to take one a semester.’

Louis : ‘Well, I know which class you should take next, Retirement 101. Now, I know you said you never want to retire, but you haven’t seen Rancho Contento. They’re accepting *early-bird* deposit. It’s a planned community in Santa Barbara and the perfect place for us to sunset.’

(S05, E18, 00:02:38)

This utterance occurred in Jessica’s and Louis’ living room; Jessica told her husband and her mother-in-law that she was accepted at Orlando State University as a magister of educational administration. Then Louis offered a retirement activity as an exciting activity that He and Jessica had to participate in while showing a retirement program brochure from Rancho Contento.

From datum (26), the utterance spoken by Louis contains an idiomatic expression. The idiomatic expression is written in italic, which is *early-bird*, which belongs to the phrasal compound idiom. Lexically, the meaning of *early* is happening or done before an expected time. Meanwhile, the word *bird* refers to an animal that has wings. The meaning of the idiomatic expression *early-bird* is an early person, therefore contextually, the

character Louis asked his wife to join the retirement program and register for the program early, so they can get the discount program.

Datum 27

Louis : ‘Amazing duet yesterday. I would’ve joined in, but Chestnut threw a piping-hot potato wedgat Trent.’

Jessica : ‘Good. You do that thing where you cup your ear, but it’s still pitchy.’

Louis : ‘Uh, it’s called harmonizing? Look about Eddie. I knew we always wanted him to go to college, but he has his own dreams.’

Jessica : ‘Louis, we worked so hard to get him here. He has a *golden opportunity*. I don’t want him to throw it all away.’

(S06, E15, 00:20:03)

Jessica was conversing with his husband, Louis, about his son’s preference to join culinary school instead of college as they dream of. However, after a long thought, Jessica fully supports her son’s decision, Eddie.

From datum (27), the utterance spoken by Jessica contains an idiomatic expression, a golden opportunity, and belongs to the phrasal compound idiom. Lexically the meaning of *golden* is colored or shining like gold, and the word *opportunity* refers to a chance. The meaning of the idiomatic expression *golden opportunity* is an excellent opportunity that does not occur often. Therefore contextually, the character Jessica believes in her son's decision to continue his education in cooking and supports his son's dream because she believes that it is a rare opportunity and can make him successful in the future. As a result, in this utterance, the lexical meaning of the idiomatic expression is related to the contextual meaning.

Datum 29

Louis : ‘And, uh, coming up on your right, you’ll see Carrot Top’s childhood home!’

Emery : ‘This is much more you, Dad.’

Louis : ‘I know! Being a tour guide combines my people skills, my passion for Orlando, and my secret desire to wear a little headset. Thanks for being my *guinea pig*.’

Honey : ‘I thought you were just giving us a ride to Mommy and Me.’

Marvin : ‘Uh, you don’t want to take Colonial at this hour, Lou.’

(S06, E4, 00:10:45)

This utterance occurred in Louis’ car; Louis, who was helped by his son Emery was trying to find his new passion besides being a manager in his restaurant. He drove Marvin and Honey while pretending to be tour guides.

From datum (29), the utterance uttered by Louis contains an idiomatic expression which is *guinea pig*, and it belongs to the phrasal compound idiom. Lexically, the word *guinea pig* is categorized as one lexeme which refers to a tailless South American rodent of a cavy family. The meaning of the idiomatic expression *guinea pig* relates to someone or something used as an experiment’s subject. Therefore, dealing with the context of the situation, this expression is used to state that the character Louis used Marvin and Honey as an object for his experiment of being a tour guide. Thus, it can be concluded that the

meaning of *guinea pig* differs between lexical and contextual meanings. For that reason, this idiomatic expression should be seen contextually.

Datum 30

Eddie: ‘Hey, Evan. Can’t sleep? Me neither. I’m not scared, but I thought you might be. Your big bro Eddie is a *night owl*. Man, you won’t believe what went down on “Thirtysomething” tonight. The Steadmans have asbestos.’

(S05, E3, 00:21:15)

In the scene, Little Eddie comes to his brother’s room. He accompanied baby Evan who was still awake at midnight.

From datum (30), the utterance uttered by Eddie contains an idiomatic expression, night *owl*, and it belongs to the phrasal compound idiom. Lexically, the meaning of *night* is the period from sunset to sunrise, which refers to hours of darkness. Meanwhile, the word *owl* refers to a nocturnal bird. The meaning of idiomatic expression *night owl* refers to a person who often stays awake or is active at night. Therefore, based on the context of the utterances, this expression is used to state that Eddie is someone who usually stays up late at night. As a result, in this utterance, the contextual meaning of idiomatic expression dominated the meaning.

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis in chapter four about the form of idiomatic expressions and the lexical and contextual meaning used in the American Sitcom Series *Fresh Off The Boat*, the researcher summarizes the points of the problems as follows.

Based on the previous data analysis, the form of utterance contains an idiomatic expression in the American Sitcom series entitled *Fresh Off The Boat* seasons 5 and 6, released in 2019 and 2020. From those seasons, the researcher collected 93 data on idiomatic expressions. Based on the form of idiomatic expressions stated by Makkai, five records are found in this Sitcom series. 21 Phrasal Verb Idioms, 50 Tournure Idioms, 1 Irreversible Binomial Idioms, 18 Phrasal Compound Idioms, and 3 Incorporating Verb Idioms

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